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Project '85

THE SAGA OF Max Hugel goes on. It will be one of the things 21st century historians will have a hard time explaining: how a New Hampshire businessman, with a prose style much given to **CAPITALS** and *italics*, has become by his own account a pivotal player each quadrennium in the portentous game of presidential politics. In 1980 Mr. Hugel was Ronald Reagan's national director of voter groups, putting together such letterhead and fund-raising organizations as the Reagan-Bush Food and Farm Division. In 1981 he became deputy director of the CIA. He left that position when charges were made against him by former business associates—charges, it should be noted, that were never formally brought.

Now he has made himself head of something called "Project '88," an organization dedicated to keeping "the new focus on Reagan and not his would-be successors"—i.e., to keeping our eyes on '85, '86, and '87, not '88. An admirable purpose, we think. America has a few problems it could stand solving now, and one thing it could stand to put off until a better time is the choice of Mr. Reagan's successor. But Mr. Hugel is going about his work in an odd fashion. Project '88's '85

project is a Dec. 11 dinner in Manchester, N.H., to honor the late William Loeb, publisher of the Manchester Union-Leader. The guest of honor will be Nackey Loeb, Mr. Loeb's widow and the paper's current publisher. The keynote speaker will be George Bush. Cochairpersons (do Republicans use this term, too?) include Jack Kemp, Robert Dole, Elizabeth Dole, Howard Baker and Jeane Kirkpatrick.

You get the idea. Mr. Hugel, in his attempt to keep our "focus" on '85, has given us the second cattle show of '88. (The first was at the Midwestern Republican gathering at Mackinac Island, Mich., last summer.) To get everyone to focus on the Reagan program, he is filling up the Sheraton-Wayfarer in what we had thought would be its off-season. In order to get the nation to focus on the tax, trade and budget policies of the Reagan administration (or to ascertain just what they are), he is giving us the spectacle of major Republican hopefuls for '88 doing in public what candidates in other years have had the decency to do in private: strive to impress the publisher of the Union-Leader. The thought may be occurring to some of you: don't they need Mr. Hugel back in Langley?